

Faith in Action

A TOOLKIT FOR CLERGY:

**PREACH. TEACH.
LEAD. ACT.**

Practical guidance for helping your congregation respond to today's most urgent issues with compassion, clarity and courage.

SERMON GUIDANCE,
TALKING POINTS,
PASTORAL SUPPORT
& ACTION STEPS



A Georgia Equality Clergy Toolkit
for LGBTQ+ Dignity, Trans Justice
& Reproductive Freedom

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A WORD TO FAITH LEADERS

Faith communities have enormous power.

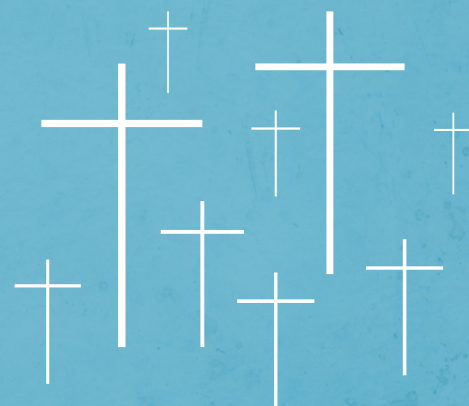
The words spoken from our pulpits can create sanctuary or stigma. Our theology can become a source of liberation, or it can be used to justify exclusion. And in moments when the dignity, safety and bodily autonomy of our neighbors are being publicly debated, silence itself communicates something.

This toolkit is designed to help clergy and faith leaders preach, teach and lead from a theology rooted in human dignity, compassion, justice and the sacred worth of every person.

It does not require every congregation to begin in the same place. It invites us to begin with a simple conviction: **every person bears sacred worth, and our faith should never become an excuse for denying another person's humanity.**

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IMAGO DEI: EVERY PERSON BEARS THE IMAGE OF GOD

Genesis 1:27 ✝

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them.”

The doctrine of Imago Dei, the image of God, offers one of Christianity’s strongest theological foundations for human dignity.

For transgender and LGBTQ+ people, this matters deeply.

Our starting theological question should not be, “How closely does this person conform to my expectations?” but rather, “Can I recognize the image of God in the person standing before me?”

Sermon Title: “The God We See in One Another”

Explore what changes when Christians understand human dignity as something bestowed by God rather than something society, government or even the Church gets to distribute.

Talking Points

- Human dignity is inherent, not earned.
- Difference does not diminish sacred worth.
- We do not have to fully understand another person’s experience to recognize their humanity. □ Dehumanization becomes particularly dangerous when it is given religious justification.
- Christians should be cautious whenever theology is used to create categories of people who are considered less worthy of safety, compassion or belonging.

CREATION IS BIGGER THAN CATEGORIES

Genesis 1:27-31 †

Genesis describes a world filled with difference: light and darkness, land and sea, day and night. Yet our lived experience teaches us that creation often exists between those categories as well.

There is dawn between night and day. There are marshes between land and sea. Biology itself contains complexity and variation.

The creation story can therefore be read not as an exhaustive taxonomy of everything that may exist, but as a theological declaration that all creation belongs to God and is called good.

Sermon Title: “And God Saw That It Was Good”

Invite the congregation to consider whether human diversity might reveal the expansiveness of creation rather than represent a departure from it.

Talking Points

- Scripture frequently uses paired categories without suggesting that nothing exists between them.
- Creation demonstrates enormous biological and human diversity.
- Transgender and intersex people do not threaten creation.
- Our theological understanding should be large enough to encounter the complexity of the world God created.



CREATION IS STILL UNFOLDING

Romans 8:22 †

Creation in Scripture is not always presented as static. Human beings grow, bodies change, communities evolve and our understanding deepens.

Transformation is also one of Scripture's recurring themes.

Abram becomes Abraham. Sarai becomes Sarah. Jacob becomes Israel. Saul becomes Paul. People leave old lives, receive new names and discover more fully who they are called to become.

These stories are not direct analogies for transgender experience, but they remind us that change itself is not foreign to faithful life.

Sermon Title: "The Sacred Work of Becoming"

What if becoming more fully ourselves is not evidence that creation has failed, but one of the ways human beings participate in an unfolding creation?

Talking Points

- Christianity is a faith filled with transformation.
- A person's life should not be reduced to who they once were or who others expected them to become.
- Faith communities should be places where people can grow into greater truth, wholeness and freedom.
- We should approach another person's journey with humility rather than presuming that we understand God's work in their life better than they do.

FAITH AND OUR GROWING UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD

Christians have repeatedly encountered new scientific, historical and social knowledge that challenged previously accepted interpretations of the world.

Faith did not disappear because human understanding grew.
Instead, theology grew with it.

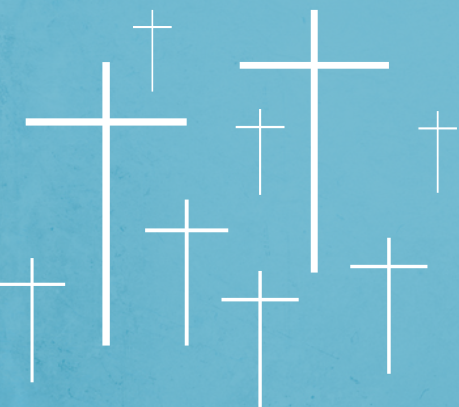
Today we know considerably more about human biology, psychology, sexuality, gender and reproduction than ancient societies understood.

Taking that knowledge seriously does not require abandoning Scripture. It requires approaching Scripture with the humility to recognize the difference between the eternal pursuit of justice, mercy and love and the historically situated assumptions of the societies in which biblical texts were written.

Sermon Title: “Faith Big Enough to Learn”

Talking Points

- Faith and intellectual humility are compatible.
- Christians have changed theological interpretations before as human knowledge expanded. Ancient people understood gender, medicine and reproduction differently than we do today.
- Responsible theology considers Scripture, tradition, reason and lived experience.
- “We have always believed this” is not, by itself, evidence that an interpretation is just.



JESUS AND THE PEOPLE PUSHED TO THE MARGINS

Again and again, Jesus moves toward people whom respectable society has pushed away. He touches people considered unclean.

He eats with people considered immoral.

He speaks publicly with people others avoid.

He repeatedly challenges religious leaders when rules become more important than human beings.

Scriptural Foundations †

- Matthew 25:31-46 - “Whatever you did for one of the least of these...”
- Luke 10:25-37 - The Good Samaritan
- Mark 2:23-28 - “The Sabbath was made for humankind.”
- John 4:1-42 - Jesus and the Samaritan woman

Sermon Title: “Who Would Jesus Sit With?”

The question for the Church is not merely whether LGBTQ+ people are permitted to enter our buildings. The deeper question is whether our ministries reflect Christ's repeated movement toward people whom religious and political institutions have marginalized.

Talking Points

- Jesus consistently moved toward people pushed to the margins.
- Compassion should take priority over social respectability and rigid rules.
- Christian community should be measured by who is welcomed, protected, and included.
- Faithfulness requires more than allowing LGBTQ+ people into the room. It requires relationship, dignity, and belonging.

BODILY AUTONOMY AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Reproductive justice asks questions larger than any single political debate.

Can people make meaningful decisions about their bodies, families and futures? Can they have children, not have children, and raise the children they have in safe and sustainable communities?

For faith communities, these are deeply moral questions.

Reproductive justice intersects with maternal health, contraception, abortion, fertility care, economic inequality, healthcare access, family formation, gender identity and the ability to live safely in one's own body.

Scriptural Foundation

1 Corinthians 12:26 ✝

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.”

Sermon Title: “Whose Body Matters?”

Move beyond political slogans and ask congregations to consider the actual lives affected by decisions about healthcare and bodily autonomy. Who is most likely to experience maternal mortality? Who can afford to travel for medical care? Who has access to contraception, prenatal care or fertility treatment? Who is criminalized, shamed or left without options? And what does our faith require when those burdens are not shared equally?

Talking Points

- Reproductive justice concerns the conditions people need to form and sustain healthy families and communities.

- Maternal mortality, healthcare disparities, poverty, housing, childcare and economic security are reproductive justice concerns.
- Black communities continue to experience profound inequities in maternal and reproductive healthcare.
- LGBTQ+ people also need reproductive healthcare and family-building services. □ Transgender and nonbinary people may become pregnant, give birth, need contraception, experience pregnancy loss, seek abortion care or use fertility services.
- Compassionate ministry begins by listening to people's actual experiences rather than reducing complicated lives to political abstractions.
- People should be able to seek spiritual care without fearing that their reproductive healthcare decisions will make them unwelcome in their faith community.

HIV HEALTHCARE AND THE MINISTRY OF ENDING STIGMA

For decades, HIV has been shaped not only by a virus, but by stigma. People living with HIV have experienced rejection from families, congregations, healthcare institutions and society. LGBTQ+ communities, Black communities and other marginalized communities have often carried a disproportionate share of that stigma.

Faith communities have sometimes contributed to this harm. They can also become part of repairing it.

Modern HIV prevention and treatment have transformed what it means to live with HIV. But medical advances alone cannot eliminate shame, misinformation or barriers to healthcare. Faith leaders can help create communities where people living with HIV are treated with dignity and where people feel comfortable seeking testing, prevention and care.

Scriptural Foundation

Matthew 25:36 

“I was sick and you took care of me.”

Sermon Title: “Healing Without Shame”

Ask the congregation what it means to care for people without first requiring them to explain, justify or defend how they became sick. Jesus repeatedly moved toward people whose health conditions made them targets of stigma and exclusion. What would it mean for our congregations to become places where healthcare is encouraged, HIV is discussed without shame and people living with HIV know they belong?

Talking Points

- HIV is a healthcare issue, not a moral judgment.

- People living with HIV deserve dignity, relationships, family, community and spiritual care.
- Shame and misinformation can prevent people from seeking testing, prevention or treatment. HIV testing can be treated as a normal part of caring for one's health.
- HIV prevention includes education, testing, condoms, PrEP and other healthcare resources. People receiving effective HIV treatment can live long, healthy lives.
- Faith communities should never use HIV status as evidence of someone's morality, sexuality or relationship with God.
- Ending HIV stigma is part of creating healthier communities.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: FAITH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

Faith does not end at the doors of the sanctuary. Many decisions that affect our communities are made in city halls, county commissions, school boards, state legislatures and voting booths.

Housing, healthcare, education, public safety, reproductive freedom, LGBTQ+ rights, HIV funding and economic opportunity all shape whether people can live safe, healthy and dignified lives.

Civic engagement gives faith communities an opportunity to put their values into public practice.

Scriptural Foundation

Micah 6:8 

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Sermon title: “Faith That Shows Up”

Justice requires more than believing the right things. It requires participation. Invite the congregation to consider what it means to practice faith not only through worship and charity, but through participation in the decisions that shape their neighbors’ lives.

Talking Points

- Civic engagement is larger than any political party or candidate.
- Voting is one form of civic participation, but it is not the only one.
- People can attend public meetings, contact elected officials, submit testimony, participate in community organizations and learn about legislation.
- Local and state government decisions often have immediate consequences for

- Congregations can help people understand how public policy affects their everyday lives.
- Democracy is stronger when people who have historically been excluded from decision-making are able to participate.
- Faith leaders can encourage civic participation without telling congregants what political party they must support.



WHEN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BECOMES RELIGIOUS HARM

Religious freedom is precious.

It protects our ability to worship, preach, organize and live according to conscience. But religious freedom should not become permission to deny another person's dignity or participation in public life.

Scriptural Foundation

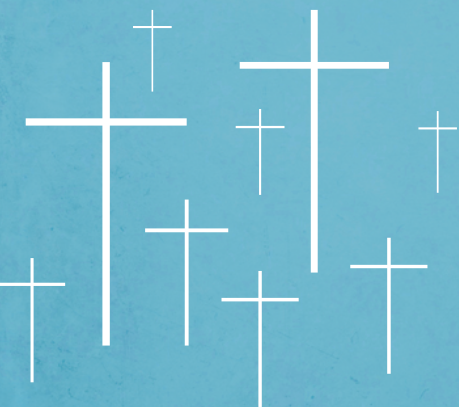
Micah 6:8

“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

Questions for Congregations

When evaluating policies proposed in the name of religion, ask:

- Who is protected?
- Who could be harmed?
- Whose religious beliefs are being privileged?
- Does this policy protect worship and conscience, or permit discrimination against someone else?
- Would we accept the same restriction if another religious tradition imposed it upon us?



CONNECTING THE PULPIT TO CURRENT ISSUES

A sermon does not need to become a political speech to address the world people actually live in.

Faith leaders can help congregations understand the moral dimensions of:

Transgender healthcare.

What does compassion require when politicians rather than families and medical professionals attempt to determine what healthcare someone may receive?

Discrimination.

Should a person's sexual orientation or gender identity determine whether they can safely work, seek housing, receive healthcare or participate in public life?

Reproductive healthcare.

What happens when laws governing pregnancy ignore complicated medical realities?
Who bears the greatest burden when care is inaccessible?

HIV prevention, treatment and stigma.

How can congregations help make testing, prevention and treatment easier to access while rejecting shame and misinformation about people living with HIV?

Violence against transgender people.

What responsibility does the Church have when a community is experiencing disproportionate violence, rejection or homelessness?

LGBTQ+ youth and families.

Can our congregations become places where families receive support rather than fear?

Poverty and economic justice.

How do discrimination, healthcare access, housing instability and economic inequality compound one another?

Civic participation.

How can faith communities help people understand, participate in and influence the public decisions that shape their lives without turning the pulpit into a partisan platform?

The pulpit can help people move beyond slogans toward moral discernment.

LANGUAGE FROM THE PULPIT MATTERS

Sometimes inclusion begins with remarkably small changes.

Instead of only saying:

“husbands and wives”

consider:

“spouses, partners and families.”

Instead of assuming every family looks the same, acknowledge adoptive families, chosen families, single-parent households, LGBTQ+ families and people whose family relationships are complicated.

When discussing transgender people, use the names and pronouns people use for themselves.

When discussing HIV, reproductive healthcare or other stigmatized health experiences, avoid language that implies illness, pregnancy or healthcare decisions reveal a person’s morality or faithfulness.

And do not speak about LGBTQ+ people only when controversy arises.

People should hear that they are loved before they hear that their existence has become a political debate.

BEYOND THE SERMON: WHAT CLERGY CAN DO

- Explicitly communicate that LGBTQ+ people are welcome and safe in your congregation.
- Include transgender and LGBTQ+ people in leadership rather than only talking about them.
- Review church policies, forms, websites, and facilities for unnecessary gendered barriers.
- Establish relationships with LGBTQ+, reproductive justice, HIV healthcare, and civic engagement organizations before a crisis occurs.
- Provide pastoral support to LGBTQ+ people and their families, people living with HIV, and people navigating reproductive health experiences.
- Learn where affirming healthcare, HIV testing and treatment, reproductive healthcare, counseling, legal, and social-service resources are available in your community.
- Speak publicly when LGBTQ+ people, people living with HIV, or people seeking reproductive healthcare are targeted, stigmatized, or dehumanized.
- Attend legislative hearings, submit testimony, or contact elected officials when policies threaten human dignity.
- Encourage nonpartisan voter registration, election participation, and civic education.
- Open church facilities for community education, health services, voter registration, and organizing when appropriate.
- Include LGBTQ+ people, reproductive justice advocates, HIV educators, and civic engagement leaders in educational programming.
- Use newsletters, Bible studies, announcements, and social media to share accurate information and concrete opportunities for action.
- Examine whether your congregation's theology has unintentionally contributed to stigma or harm.
- Make room for testimony from people whose lives are directly affected by the issues being discussed.

QUESTIONS FOR SERMON PREPARATION

Before preaching about gender, sexuality, reproductive justice, HIV or civic engagement, ask yourself:

1. Have I listened to the people most affected?
2. Am I preaching about people who are absent from the room as though they are an abstraction? Am I distinguishing Scripture itself from my interpretation of Scripture?
3. Does my message produce dignity, compassion and justice, or fear and shame? Have I considered the historical and cultural context of the passage?
4. Am I relying on accurate information, especially when discussing healthcare or public policy? Am I willing to acknowledge what I do not know?

And perhaps most importantly:

If a transgender person, a queer teenager, someone living with HIV, someone considering an abortion, someone who has had an abortion, a parent struggling to understand their LGBTQ+ child, or someone who feels shut out of civic life were sitting in my congregation today, what would they learn about God from the words I am about to preach?



SERMON STARTERS

“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”

Psalm 139:13-14

A sermon about embodiment, dignity and resisting the idea that some bodies are inherently less sacred than others.

“What God Has Made Clean”

Acts 10:9-16

A sermon about Peter’s transformation and what happens when God challenges religious assumptions about who belongs.

“There Is No Longer Male and Female”

Galatians 3:28

A sermon examining Christian identity, equality and the ways social categories can become systems of hierarchy.

“Do Justice, Love Mercy”

Micah 6:8

A sermon connecting faith with public responsibility toward marginalized communities.

“The Sacred Work of Becoming”

2 Corinthians 5:17

A sermon about transformation, authenticity and the theological possibility that becoming can itself be holy.

“Healing Without Shame”

Matthew 25:36

A sermon about rejecting health stigma and creating communities where people living with HIV can seek care, belonging and spiritual support without shame.

“Faith That Shows Up”

Micah 6:8

A sermon about civic responsibility and how faith communities can participate in public life in ways rooted in justice, mercy and human dignity.

A FINAL WORD

The Church does not need to have every question answered before it chooses compassion.

Faithfulness sometimes begins with humility: listening before speaking, learning before judging, and recognizing that the people whose lives are being debated are not issues.

They are our neighbors.

They are members of our congregations.

They are our children, parents, siblings, friends and clergy.

They bear the image of God.

And when the dignity of our neighbors is threatened, our faith calls us to more than quiet sympathy. It calls us toward justice, mercy, courage and love.



About Us

Georgia Equality works to advance fairness, safety and opportunity for LGBTQ+ people across Georgia. Through advocacy, public education, leadership development and community organizing, Georgia Equality helps build a state where LGBTQ+ people can live openly, access the resources they need and participate fully in civic life.

Clergy and faith leaders: bring a Faith in Action workshop to your congregation or faith community. Contact Georgia Equality to explore a training that equips leaders with tools to build more welcoming, affirming, and justice-centered spaces.

Contact Us

Contact Georgia Equality to schedule a training and prepare your faith community for the work ahead.



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